

The USACBRNS DIMA Team: Training Officers to a Higher Standard

By Captain Herschel H. Flowers

Twice a year, for two weeks at a time, a group of officers and senior noncommissioned officers meet at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, to implement a plan that they have been working on for the past year. These Soldiers are members of the U.S. Army Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear School (USACBRNS) Drilling Individual Mobilization Augmentee (DIMA) Team. Their mission is to ensure that the training standards for the Reserve Component Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear Captain's Career Course (RC-CBRNC3) are met or exceeded during each training period.

This is not an easy job. These team members have different backgrounds, busy civilian careers, and family obligations that must be put aside in an attempt to ensure that the 100-plus chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) lieutenants, captains, and majors who attend RC-CBRNC3 each year successfully complete Phases III and V. To make this task even more challenging, these two phases (which sometimes have completely different logistical requirements) take place concurrently at different locations throughout Fort Leonard Wood. This requires the DIMA Team members to be flexible and adaptable—ready to fit in at one place and able to participate in another training event or activity in another location just hours later.

The senior instructor and officer in charge of the DIMA Team is Major Robert Danner. He is responsible for coordinating the overall operation of the team, which is afforded two weeks during each phase to carefully balance the wartime and defense support to civil authorities mission training required by many National Guard CBRN officers who serve on civil support teams (CSTs). "It's always difficult to strike a balance between our current 'green mission' and the 'white mission' that many of the officers that attend Phase III and Phase V train for as members of CSTs or CERFP [chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, and high-yield explosives enhanced response force package] units across the country," Major Danner admits. "Add to that the fact that, on average, we have over ten branch transfer officers per phase during each course who never received the basic CBRN officer training, but who must meet the standards and requirements just like everyone else and who, at times, will require special attention from the instructors to accomplish tasks that other CBRN officers are already familiar with."

Still, Major Danner acknowledges that the challenges faced by the DIMA Team keep the members motivated—not only to find different ways in which to teach the material for each

course, but also to come up with suggestions for modifying and improving course plans. "We take all [end-of-course, after-action reviews] very seriously and try [to] incorporate suggestions made by students in either the way we teach the material or with the material itself—in which case, we pass these comments on to the course managers, who will use them when putting together future programs of instruction."

But for every successful course, there must be an administrative and logistical framework of support for the instructors and students. The DIMA Team member responsible for ensuring that this framework is in place for the RC-CBRNC3 is Sergeant Major Jack Tussey. Sergeant Major Tussey, who has more than forty years of experience, ensures that the course is conducted safely and efficiently. "Safety is our number one priority while we are here. Every member of our DIMA Team, every student that takes part in these courses has someone behind them that helped them get here. Wives, sons and daughters, mothers and fathers—they all deserve to have their Soldiers back home safely, and it's our responsibility to make sure that, while they are here at Fort Leonard Wood, our operations are run with safety as our top priority. From the day they arrive to the time they take their [physical training] test, go through the Chemical Defense Training Facility, and until they leave my care, we strive to complete each task safely."

Major Danner and Sergeant Major Tussey know that, although considerable work is required for RC-CBRNC3 Phase III and Phase V preparation, the unique DIMA Team is up to the challenge of maintaining a current knowledge of all CBRN doctrine and real-world missions and continually seeking new ways to prepare Soldiers to leave Fort Leonard Wood with the knowledge and expertise that they need when they return home. "We come together as a team, where everyone uses their military background, education, professional knowledge, and even past experiences to plan out the tasks for each year and the direction or focus for each phase . . . to anticipate the needs and obstacles students might have while here," Danner said. "While the Active Component captains have months [to learn what they need to know], we have less than one to make sure [Reserve Component officers] are prepared to face the challenges at their units."

The success of the DIMA Team is partly due to team members conducting regular conference calls and working on plans and schedules months in advance. They realize that, as one course ends, another is on the horizon and that possible

modifications must be discussed, planned, and, if necessary, applied in the near term. “Less than one hour after the students from Phase V stepped off the graduation stage this past July, our team was discussing the [after-action reviews] students submitted, possible changes in the upcoming courses, logistical problems that we faced, our overall opinion on how everything went, as well as the schedules for our next conference calls,” Sergeant Major Tussey explained.

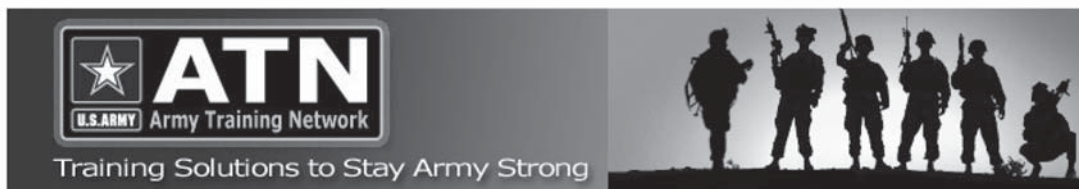
In addition to the tasks already described, some members of the DIMA Team may be selected for mobilization. Much of the heavy, day-to-day burden falls on those members. They are in contact with potential students; and they coordinate future training events, sometimes reserving locations for class functions months in advance. They also ensure that all officers meet the course prerequisites, answer questions posed by Soldiers and their units before arriving at Fort Leonard Wood, and track student advancement through distributed learning modules. Last year, Major Joan Lenahan-Bernard was mobilized; she coordinated the logistics that allowed the unit to complete these missions.

Major Lenahan-Bernard understands the uniqueness of the team and each member’s role in the overall mission. “Our DIMA Team does a great job when we meet twice here at Fort Leonard Wood, but it’s also our job during the remainder of

the year, either back here at the schoolhouse while mobilized or wherever we may be, to make sure that the students have someone able to answer any questions they might have regarding these courses—be that schedules, enrollment in Phases III and V, the requirements they need to meet, even the [distributed] learning courses they need to complete before arriving, since these courses serve as the framework for a lot of what they are going to see while they are here,” she said. “They incorporate both their wartime mission as well as education in areas that are part of their stateside mission.”

Regardless of their position on the USACBRNS DIMA Team, team members ensure that officers attending the courses leave with an understanding of their mission and that they are ready to assume higher levels of responsibility—as company commanders or staff officers who can provide commanders with the knowledge necessary to succeed in CBRN situations. 🔍

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